



# **B u d d h a   N a t u r e**

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## BUDDHA NATURE

The topic of this course on Buddhist philosophy is *Buddha Nature*. The explanations given here are primarily based on Maitreya's *Abhisamayalamkara* (Tib: *mngon rtogs rgyan*, ***Ornament for Clear Realization***) and taken from Panchen Sonam Drakpa's<sup>1</sup> commentaries, the ***General Meaning*** and ***Decisive Analysis***.

The Buddhist scriptures use different terms that connote *Buddha Nature*:

- Sanskrit: *sugatagarbha* / Tibetan: *bde gshegs snying po* / English: Essence of the One Gone to Bliss
- Sanskrit: *tathagatagarbha* / Tibetan: *de gshegs snying po* / English: Essence of the One Thus Gone
- Sanskrit: *gotra* / Tibetan: *rigs* / English: affinity, lineage, family, class, type, species, status, nature, potential, etc.
- Sanskrit: *dhatu* / Tibetan: *khams* / English: element, constituent

The term used in the *Abhisamayalamkara* is *rigs* or *sangs rgyas kyi rigs*, with *sangs rgyas* meaning Buddha. The English

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<sup>1</sup> Panchen Sonam Drakpa was the fifteenth [Ganden Tripa](#) (holder of the [Ganden Monastery](#) throne and thus head of the Gelugpa tradition). A student of the second [Dalai Lama](#), he later became the tutor of the [third Dalai Lama](#). He served as the abbot of each one of the main Gelugpa monastic universities – Ganden, Drepung, and Sera. Panchen Sonam Drakpa's collected works comprise fourteen volumes, including the main textbooks still in use in Drepung's Loseling College, Ganden's Shartse College, the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, and many other monastic institutions inside and outside Tibet. Monks and nuns in these institutions mainly rely upon the works of this great teacher to prepare for their Geshe degree.

term commonly used to translate *sangs rgyas kyi rigs* is 'Buddha Nature'.

In general, Buddha Nature refers to something which every sentient being possesses and which enables [sentient beings](#) to become Buddhas. However, it is explained differently in various scriptures, in particular across the different philosophical tenet systems.

According to the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras***, there are two types of Buddha Nature:

- 1) *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* (Tib: *rang bzhin gnas rigs*)
- 2) *Evolving Buddha Nature* (Tib: *rgyas 'gyur gyi rigs*)

Of the two, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is described as the principal *Buddha Nature*. It refers to the emptiness of a sentient being's mental consciousness; it is the main factor that facilitates the development and transformation of the mind, for if the mind did not lack inherent existence, the mental consciousness of a sentient being could not change; it could not be gradually freed from afflictive and cognitive obstructions and thus become the enlightened mind of a Buddha.

Furthermore, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is explained to be 'suitable to become the *Dharmakaya* (Truth Body) of a Buddha'. Here, the *Dharmakaya* of a Buddha – which the *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is suitable to become – refers to the *Nature Body of Natural Purity*<sup>2</sup>, i.e., the emptiness of the omniscient mental consciousness of a Buddha. Therefore, the emptiness of a sentient being's mental

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<sup>2</sup> For the different categories of a Buddha's Kaya please see the chart.

consciousness will become the emptiness of his mental consciousness as a Buddha. In other words, when a sentient being attains Buddhahood, the emptiness of his formerly obstructed mental consciousness becomes the emptiness of his now non-obstructed and omniscient mental consciousness.

*Evolving Buddha Nature* refers to either (1) a sentient being's mental consciousness itself or (2) the potential of that mental consciousness to remove obstructions and achieve the realizations of a Buddha. The mental consciousness also serves as the basis of the *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* (the mental consciousness' emptiness). Furthermore, the mental consciousness is suitable to become the *Jñanakaya* (Wisdom Body), while the potential of the mental consciousness (*i.e.*, the potential to remove obstructions and achieve the realizations of a Buddha) is suitable to become the *Rupakaya* (Form Body) of a Buddha. This means that in the future, when the sentient being becomes a Buddha, the continuum of his mental consciousness will become the mental consciousness (the *Jñanakaya*) of his future Buddha while the continuum of the potential will become the *Rupa Kaya*.

*Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* and *Evolving Buddha Nature* are explained in more detail below.

Buddha Nature can also be categorized into thirteen different types, which are also explained below.

### **A general presentation of Buddha Nature – from Panchen Sonam Drakpa's *General Meaning***

In his **General Meaning**, Panchen Sonam Drakpa cites the following sutric passages that teach Buddha Nature:

*Then the Venerable Subhuti thus asks the Victorious One, "what is the meaning of the term: 'the Bodhisattva, the great heroic being', which the Victorious One uses?"*

In answer to Subhuti's question as to the meaning of the term 'Bodhisattva' that is cited frequently during topics such as 'Bodhicitta', and so forth, the Buddha replies:

*Having thus been asked, the Victorious One explains thus to the Venerable Subhuti, "Subhuti, the meaning of the term 'Bodhisattva' is that it has no meaning. If one were to ask why? - [The reason is that] a Bodhisattva is not perceived to be born or to exist or to be non-existent. Subhuti, therefore, the meaning of the term 'Bodhisattva' is that it has no meaning."*

This sutric passage briefly indicates the nature of Buddha Nature.

*Subhuti, it is like this: for instance, one does not perceive the track of a bird in the sky...*

And so forth. The latter is an excerpt from the sutric passage that sets forth the thirteen types of Buddha Nature.

The citation of the sutric passages is followed by the first line of the two verses of the **Ornament** that describe Buddha Nature in general and the thirteen types of Buddha Nature, in particular:

*The six dharmas of realization,  
The antidote and the elimination,  
Having fully consumed those,  
Endowed with wisdom and compassionate love,  
  
Not common to disciples  
The proper sequence of others' benefit,*

*And exalted wisdom engaging without exertion -  
Their support should be known as Buddha Nature.*

The meaning of these two verses is explained below.

The **General Meaning** then proceeds to expound on Buddha Nature by setting forth four subtopics:

1. Buddha Nature according to the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika School
2. Buddha Nature according to the Cittamātra School
3. The refutation of the Cittamātra School in Arya Vimuktisena's<sup>3</sup> ***Illuminating the [Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]*** (Skt. ***Abhisamayālaṅkāravṛtti***, Tib: ***nyi khri snang ba***)
4. Explanation of our own system, the Middle Way School

### **Buddha Nature according to the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika Schools:**

The proponents of the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika School do not use the term 'Buddha Nature' but the term '*Arya nature*'. The sutras that teach the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika tenets explain Arya nature to have four aspects:

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<sup>3</sup> Arya Vimuktisena (Tib: '*phags pa rnam grol sde*') (around 6th C.E.) is the author of the earliest commentary on the ***Abhisamayalankara*** which relates to the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutra Twenty-Five Thousand Stanzas***. Vimuktisena was the nephew of the great Indian master Buddhadhasa and a disciple of Vasubhandu.

Vasubhandu had four great disciples who were more learned in particular topics than himself. Of these, Vimuktisena was more learned in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, Dignaga was more learned in *Pramana* (Logic), Sthiramati who was more learned in *Abhidharma*, and Gunaprabha who was more learned in the *Vinaya*.

- i. Being satisfied with simple monastic robes
- ii. Being satisfied with simple dwellings
- iii. Being satisfied with simple alms
- iv. Taking great delight in eliminating [afflictions] and meditating

The first three aspects enable practitioners to temporarily overcome craving for their possessions and facilitate meditation on the path. The fourth aspect enables practitioners to engage in actual meditation and irreversibly eradicate craving for the self and one's possessions.

A person who possesses these four aspects possesses Arya nature.

Vasubandhu says in his ***Treasury of Knowledge*** (Skt: ***Abhidharmakosha***, Tib: ***chos mngon pa mdzod***):

*Non-attachment - Arya nature.*

*Among them, three are the entity of satisfaction.*

*They present the way; the last, the action.*

*Because of being the antidotes to the production of craving,*

*They are for the sake of the temporary and utter pacification of*

*Desire for the phenomena conceived to be mine and I.*

The reason the four aspects are called Arya nature is that in dependence on the four, practitioners attain the state of an Arya (i.e., the path of seeing directly realizing selflessness).

Vasubandhu says in his ***Auto-Commentary on the Treasury of Knowledge*** (Skt: ***Abhidharmakosha-bhasya***, Tib: ***chos mngon pa mdzod rang 'grel***):

*If someone asks, 'why are they called Arya nature?' - [Our response is:] since from those an Arya being is generated, there are four.*

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his **Golden Rosary** (Tib: **legs bshad gser phreng**) that the difference between those of sharp and weak mental faculty can be explained from the point of view of Buddha Nature:

*The difference between those of sharp and weak mental faculty can be posited from the point of view of Buddha Nature because [Vasubandhu says] in the **Treasury of Knowledge**, "Some possess their nature from the start; some change through training."*

However, unlike the proponents of the other philosophical tenet schools (the Cittamātra and Madhyamika), proponents of the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika schools do not assert a *Naturally Abiding* or *Evolving Nature*.

According to the **Heart-Jewel that Delights Those of Clear Understanding** (Tib: **blo gsal dga' bskyed snying gi nor bu**) a popular Tibetan commentary on Panchen Sonam Drakpa's **General Meaning** and **Decisive Analysis**, composed by the late Geshe Pema Gyaltzen, a contemporary master and former abbot of Drepung Loseling Monastery, there is a difference between the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika schools regarding their assertion of Arya nature. Even though both generally set forth the four aspects of Arya nature mentioned above, the proponents of the Sautrāntika School also propound Arya nature to refer to seeds based on the mental consciousness that have the potential to lead a person to the state of an Arya and liberation.

Geshe Pema Gyaltzen supports this claim by citing two quotes. The first is from a commentary on the **Abhidharmakosha** by one of Vasubandhu's disciples, called **Jinaputra** (Tib: **rgyal sras ma**):



*For the proponents of the Sautrantika, [Arya] Nature refers to the potential that is a seed on the mind. At the level of ordinary beings and learners, [Arya] Nature refers to the seed [that leads to the attainment of the six types of Arhats such as] 'those who bear the feature of degeneration'.*

Please note that of the six types of Arhats<sup>4</sup> (*those who bear the feature of degeneration, those who bear the feature of killing*

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<sup>4</sup> The six types of Arhats are:

(1) *Those who bear the feature of degeneration* are Arhats whose special kind of mental and physical happiness (which is the result of mental absorptions) degenerates irrespective of whether they are distracted by the five sense objects or not.

(2) *Those who bear the feature of killing themselves* are Arhats whose special kind of mental and physical happiness (which is the result of mental absorptions) degenerates if they do not pass onto Nirvana without remainder, but does not degenerate if they do.

(3) *Those who bear the feature of subsequent protection* are Arhats whose special kind of mental and physical happiness (which is the result of mental absorptions) degenerates if they do not greatly protect their mind from distraction by the five sense objects, but does not degenerate if they do.

(4) *Those who bear the feature of not leaving that state* are Arhats whose special kind of mental and physical happiness (which is the result of mental absorptions) does not degenerate irrespective of whether they protect their mind or not. However,

they are unable to change into foe-destroyers of sharp mental faculty.

(5) *Those who bear the feature of being worthy of achievement* are Arhats whose special kind of mental and physical happiness (which is the result of mental absorptions) does not degenerate and who change into foe-destroyers of sharp mental faculty.

(6) *Those who are unmoving* are Arhats who are of sharp mental faculty from the outset and whose special kind of mental and physical happiness (which is the result of mental absorptions) does not degenerate.



*themselves, etc.)* the first five are not asserted by the proponents of the Cittamātra or Madhyamika.

The second quote is from Khedrup Je's commentary [on Haribhadra's **Commentary Clarifying the Meaning**] called ***Illuminating Difficult Realizations*** (Tib: *rtogs dka'i snang ba*):

*[The proponents of the Sautrāntika] accept [Arya] Nature to refer to the potential that generates Arya Dharma and is based on the mental consciousness.*

### **Buddha Nature according to the Cittamātra School:**

The ***Abhidharma Sutra*** says:

*Buddha Nature of Bodhisattvas is that which (1) has existed without obstruction since beginningless time, (2) is obtained by dharmatā, and (3) is the distinctive feature of the six sense-sources.*

The proponents of the Cittamātra School assert that Buddha Nature can be categorized into:

- a. *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*
- b. *Evolving Buddha Nature*

According to the Cittamātra School, Buddha Nature refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom. Here, the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom constitutes the potential in a sentient being's continuum that enables him to cultivate uncontaminated exalted wisdom and become an Arya. Such uncontaminated exalted wisdom is essential to progress on the path, for it serves as the direct antidote to afflictive and cognitive obstructions.

Of the two types of Buddha Nature, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* represents the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has not yet been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Buddha Dharma, whereas *Evolving Buddha Nature* refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Buddha Dharma.

Furthermore, Buddha Nature (both *Naturally Abiding* and *Evolving Buddha Nature*) possesses the three characteristics mentioned in the quote of the ***Abhidharma Sutra*** cited above:

1. It has existed since beginningless time
2. It is obtained by dharmatā
3. It is the distinctive feature of the six sense-sources

### **1. It has existed since beginningless time**

Buddha Nature has existed since beginningless time, for there has never been a time when its previous continuum did not exist in the form of the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom. This is true for both the *Naturally Abiding* and the *Evolving Nature*. Even though *Evolving Buddha Nature* only comes into existence after *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, its continuum has nonetheless existed since beginningless time in the form of the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom.

### **2. It is obtained by dharmatā**

It is obtained by dharmatā because it arose naturally and was not posited by an awareness. In general, mental seeds that are not Buddha Nature were posited

by a consciousness. For instance, a seed of anger or a karmic seed were both posited on the mental consciousness by an awareness (the seed of anger was posited by anger itself). However, the continuums of both *Naturally Abiding* and *Evolving Nature* have existed in the form of the seeds of uncontaminated exalted wisdom since beginningless time and were therefore not left by a consciousness. Please note that here dharmatā does not mean 'emptiness' but nature, reality, actuality, etc.

### **3. It is the distinctive feature of the six sense-sources**

In general the six sense-sources can be categorized into the six external sense-sources and the six internal sense-sources. The six external sense-sources are:

1. Visual forms (i.e., shapes and colors)
2. Sounds
3. Odors
4. Tastes
5. Tangible objects
6. Phenomena

The first five external sense-sources constitute the principal objects of the five sense consciousnesses and the sixth, phenomena, is the principal object of the mental consciousness.

The six internal sense-sources are:

1. The eye sense-source
2. The ear sense-source
3. The nose sense-source
4. The tongue sense-source
5. The body sense-source
6. The phenomena sense-source

The first five sense-sources refer to the five sense powers, *i.e.*, the subtle physical forms that serve as the uncommon empowering conditions of their respective sense consciousnesses, which enable the sense awarenesses to perceive their respective sense objects. For instance, the 'eye sense-source' is the subtle physical form that serves as the uncommon empowering condition of the eye consciousness and enables the eye consciousness to perceive visual objects (shapes and colors).

The sixth sense-source, the 'phenomena sense-source', refers to mental consciousness itself - or more precisely - to the mental consciousness that is the uncommon empowering condition of its next moment of mental consciousness and which enables that next moment of mental consciousness to apprehend a phenomenon.

Regarding the third characteristic of Buddha Nature, *being the distinctive feature of the six sense-sources*, this refers to Buddha Nature being the distinctive feature of the six *internal* sense-sources. There are different explanations of the meaning of this characteristic.

According to Lama Tsongkhapa's ***Commentary on the Difficult Points of the Mind-basis-of-all*** (Tib: *kun gzhi'i dka' 'grel*), the third characteristic refers to the fact that the six sense-sources in the continuum of someone who has Buddha Nature are more distinguished than the six sense-sources of someone who does not possess such Buddha Nature. Please note that this explanation is from the point of view of the Cittamātra School Following Scripture, the proponents of which assert that there are sentient

beings who do not possess Buddha Nature (whereas most<sup>5</sup> of the proponents of the Cittamātra School Following Reasoning assert that all sentient beings possess Buddha Nature).

The ***Commentary on the Difficult Points of the Mind-basis-of-all*** says:

*Why is it described as being ‘the distinctive feature of the six sense-sources’? Because in whoever’s continuum it is found, it makes their six sense-sources more distinguished than [the six sense-sources of] others [who do not possess Buddha Nature].*

However, Lama Tsongkhapa gives a different explanation in his ***Golden Rosary***. This explanation is summarized by Geshe Pema Gyaltzen in his ***Heart-Jewel that Delights those of Clear Understanding***, where he says that Buddha Nature is the distinctive feature of the six sense-sources because it constitutes the potential that makes it possible to free the six sense-sources from the defilements (i.e., afflictive and cognitive obstructions).

In general, proponents of the Cittamātra can be categorized into (1) Followers of Scripture who assert the existence of a mind-basis-of-all (Skt: *Alayavijnana*, Tib: *kun gzhi*) and (2) Followers of Reasoning who do not assert the existence of a mind-basis-of-all.

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<sup>5</sup> There are some scriptures which suggest that a small section of the Chittamatra Following Reasoning accept that there are *three final vehicles*, i.e., that not all sentient beings attain the enlightened state of a Buddha. Instead, these philosophers hold that many sentient beings become Hearer and Solitary Realizer Arhats after which their mental continuum is severed so that they do not enter the Mahayana path and reach Buddhahood.

The proponents of both schools explain that Buddha Nature refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that holds the potential to generate the realizations of one of the three vehicles (Hearer, Solitary Realizer, or Bodhisattva vehicle). When the *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Buddha Dharma it transforms into or becomes the *Evolving Buddha Nature*.

The difference between the two sub-schools of the Cittamātra is with regard to the mind on which of the seeds of uncontaminated exalted wisdom are based. The proponents of the Cittamātra Following Scripture assert that those seeds and thus the two types of Buddha Nature are based on the mind-basis-of-all while the proponents of the Cittamātra Following Reasoning do not accept the existence of such a mind and instead hold that these seeds are based on the mental consciousness.

Gyaltsab je says in his ***Ornament of the Essence***:

*[Buddha says in the **Abhidharma**] Sutra: “Buddha Nature of Bodhisattvas is that which (1) has existed without obstruction since beginningless time, (2) is obtained by dharmatā, and (3) is the distinguishing feature of the six sense-sources.” According to the proponents of the Cittamātra , interpreting the meaning of this passage, if a mind-basis-of-all is posited, [Buddha Nature refers to] the potential that is capable of generating the realizations of any of the three vehicles when the uncontaminated seed that exists [based] on the internal six sense-sources encounters the condition [of listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma]. When the mind-basis-of-all is posited, if the uncontaminated seed existing [based] on the mind-basis-of-all has not been nourished by the condition*

*[of listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma] it is called 'Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature'; if it has been nourished by the condition of listening [contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma] and becomes special, it is called 'Evolving Buddha Nature'.*

Asanga says in his **Bodhisattva Bhumi** (Tib: **byang sa**)

*If someone asks, what is Buddha Nature? - [Our response is:] in brief, there are two [types] - Naturally Abiding and Correct Accomplishment (i.e., Evolving Buddha Nature). Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature refers to the distinctive feature of Bodhisattvas' six sense-sources. It continues from one [moment] to the next since beginningless time and is obtained by dharmatā.*

*Correct Accomplishment Buddha Nature refers to that which is achieved by having previously accustomed oneself to root virtue.*

Asanga also says in his **Shravaka Bhumi** (Tib: **nyan sa**):

*The seeds that do not produce results and do not establish results are said to be subtler. At the time when they produce results and establish results, the seeds and the results become one. Therefore, [at that time] Buddha Nature is taught to be coarse.*

When pondering these quotes it seems that one needs to say that according to the Cittamātra School, since *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* and *Evolving Buddha Nature* are contradictory, there is no longer any *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* in the continuum of Bodhisattvas who have entered the path of accumulation. Hence, Buddha Nature in the continuum of those Bodhisattvas is necessarily *Evolving Buddha Nature*.



In addition to Buddha Nature, the scriptures set forth three other types of nature: (1) Hearer Nature (Tib: *nyan thos kyi rigs*), (2) Solitary Realizer Nature (Tib: *rang rgyal gyi rigs*), and (3) Mahayana Nature (Tib: *theg chen gyi rigs*), with Mahayana Nature being different from Buddha Nature (which is explained below).

Please note that the following explanation is not from the **General Meaning**, but it may be helpful to understand the remaining explanations on Buddha Nature provided in that text.

### **Hearer Nature**

Hearer Nature refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Hearer Nature but not yet attained the state of a Hearer Arhat.

A practitioner who has awakened Hearer Nature is a practitioner who is highly determined to practice the Hearer path and become a Hearer Arhat. Upon receiving Hinayana teachings and inspiration through the example of Hearer practitioners or Hearer Arhats he experiences great joy and exhibits physical reactions such as his eyes filling with tears and his body hair standing on end.

Please note that unlike Buddha Nature, Hearer Nature cannot be categorized into (1) *Naturally Abiding Hearer Nature* and (2) *Evolving Hearer Nature*, because Hearer Nature is necessarily *Evolving Nature*. It is necessarily *Evolving Nature* because it refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Hearer Nature (but not yet attained the state of a Hearer Arhat), and whose seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom



has thus been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on Hinayana teachings.

Also, Hearer Nature and Buddha Nature are not contradictory, for whatever is Hearer Nature is necessarily *Evolving Buddha Nature*. It is *Evolving Buddha Nature* because it is the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma.

Gyaltsab je says in the ***Ornament of the Essence***:

*That which has been nourished only by listening to Hearer Dharma is called 'Hearer Nature'.*

### ***Solitary Realizer Nature***

Solitary Realizer Nature refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Solitary Realizer Nature but not yet attained the state of a Solitary Realizer Arhat.

A practitioner who has awakened Solitary Realizer Nature is a practitioner who is highly determined to practice the Solitary Realizer path and become a Solitary Realizer Arhat. Upon receiving Hinayana teachings and inspiration through the example of Solitary Realizer practitioners or Solitary Realizer Arhats he experiences great joy and exhibits physical reactions such as his eyes filling with tears and his body hair standing on end.

Like Hearer Nature, Solitary Realizer Nature cannot be categorized into (1) *Naturally Abiding Solitary Realizer Nature* and (2) *Evolving Solitary Realizer Nature*, because whatever is Solitary Realizer Nature is necessarily *Evolving Solitary Realizer Nature*. It is necessarily *Evolving Nature* because it

refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Solitary Realizer Nature (but not yet attained the state of a Solitary Realizer Arhat), and whose seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom has therefore been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on Hinayana teachings.

Moreover, Solitary Realizer Nature and Buddha Nature are not contradictory, for whatever is Solitary Realizer Nature is necessarily *Evolving Buddha Nature*.

Gyaltsab je says in the ***Ornament of the Essence***:

*That which has only been nourished by listening to Dharma of non-inherently existing objects of perception is called Solitary Realizer Nature.*

### ***Mahayana Nature***

Mahayana Nature refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Mahayana Nature but not yet attained the state of a Mahayana Arhat, *i.e.*, a Buddha.

A practitioner who has awakened Mahayana Nature constitutes a person who has cultivated great compassion, who is highly determined to practice the Mahayana path and become a Buddha, who is able to endure any type of hardship for the benefit of others, and who demonstrates intense diligence when engaging in the deeds of a Bodhisattva.

Maitreya says in his ***Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*** (Skt.: ***Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra***, Tib: ***mdo sde rgyan***):

*Before [engaging in] training, compassion and  
Determination and endurance and  
The proper deeds of virtue*

*Should be known as the signs of [having awakened Mahayana] Nature.*

"Before [engaging in] training" here means that practitioners awaken Mahayana Nature before they enter the Mahayana path. (This is also the case for practitioners of the Hearer and Solitary Realizer vehicle; those aspiring to Hearer and Solitary Realizer practices awaken Hearer Nature and Solitary Realizer Nature before they enter their respective paths.)

Like Hearer and Solitary Realizer Nature, Mahayana Nature cannot be categorized into (1) *Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature* and (2) *Evolving Mahayana Nature*, for whatever is Mahayana Nature is necessarily *Evolving Nature*. It is necessarily *Evolving Nature* because it refers to the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Mahayana Nature (but not yet attained the state of a Buddha), and whose seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom has therefore been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on Mahayana teachings.

Gyaltsab je says in the ***Ornament of the Essence***:

*That which has been nourished by listening to profound and extensive Dharma is called 'Mahayana Nature'.*

Furthermore, as mentioned above, there is a difference between Mahayana Nature and Buddha Nature. Whatever is Mahayana Nature is necessarily Buddha Nature, but whatever is Buddha Nature is *not* necessarily Mahayana Nature. For instance, the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a person who is not interested in the Buddha Dharma is Buddha Nature (*Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*) but not Mahayana Nature. It is not Mahayana Nature because it is not the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the

continuum of a person who has awakened Mahayana Nature. Another example of Buddha Nature that is not Mahayana Nature is the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Hearer Nature. The seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Hearer Nature is Buddha Nature because it is *Evolving Buddha Nature*. However, it is not Mahayana Nature because it is not the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Mahayana Nature.

With regard to the three types of nature (Hearer, Solitary Realizer, and Mahayana Nature), the scriptures also mention three types of sentient being:

- i. Someone who is endowed with Hearer Nature (Tib: *nyan thos kyi rigs can*)
- ii. Someone who is endowed with Solitary Realizer Nature (Tib: *rang rgyal gyi rigs can*)
- iii. Someone who is endowed with Mahayana Nature (Tib: *theg chen gyi rigs can*)

Someone who is endowed with Hearer Nature refers to a sentient being who has awakened Hearer Nature, someone who is endowed with Solitary Realizer Nature to a sentient being who has awakened Solitary Realizer Nature, and someone who is endowed with Mahayana Nature to a sentient being who has awakened Mahayana Nature.

Furthermore, Panchen Sonam Drakpa says in his **General Meaning** that the proponents of the Cittamātra School Following Scripture assert the following three types of sentient being:

- a. A sentient being who is definite with regard to the nature of one of the three vehicles (Tib: *theg pa gsum po so sor rigs nges pa'i sems can*)
- b. A sentient beings who is not definite with regard to the nature of one of the three vehicles (Tib: *theg pa gsum gang du yang rigs ma nges pa'i sems can*)
- c. A sentient beings who lacks a nature, i.e., the potential to attain liberation or Buddhahood (Tib: *rigs chad kyi sems can*)

Since, as mentioned above, the most of the proponents of the Cittamātra School Following Reasoning assert that all sentient beings have Buddha Nature and will eventually attain Buddhahood, they only accept the first two types but not the third.

**a. A sentient being who is definite with regard to the nature of one of the three vehicles**

A sentient being who is definite with regard to the nature of one of the three vehicles can be further categorized into:

- I) Someone who is definite with regard to Hearer Nature (Tib: *nyan thos kyi rigs nges*)
- II) Someone who is definite with regard to Solitary Realizer Nature (Tib: *rang gyal gyi rigs nges*)
- III) Someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature (Tib: *theg chen gyi rigs nges*)

'Someone who is definite with regard to Hearer Nature' refers to a person (1) who will definitely attain the state of a Hinayana Arhat and (2) who either has awakened Hearer Nature or will awaken Hearer Nature within his current lifetime.

'Someone who is definite with regard to Solitary Realizer Nature' refers to a person (1) who will definitely attain the state of a Solitary Realizer Arhat and (2) who either has awakened Solitary Realizer Nature or will awaken Solitary Realizer Nature within his current lifetime.

And 'someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature' refers to a person (1) who will attain Buddhahood without losing Bodhicitta and entering the Hinayana path and (2) who either has awakened Mahayana Nature or will awaken Mahayana Nature in his current lifetime.

Gyalsab je says in the ***Ornament of the Essence***: *That which, by way of its own entity, is definite with regard to being the cause of the realizations of one of the three vehicles is called 'definite nature'.*

**b. A sentient being whose nature is not definite with regard to pertaining to one of the three vehicles**

A sentient being whose nature is not definite with regard to pertaining to one of the three vehicles refers to a person who enters any one of the three paths depending on which teachings he meets with first. He enters the Hearer vehicle if he first meets with the teachings that pertain to the Hinayana vehicle and receives inspiration to become a Hearer Arhat, he enters the Solitary Realizer vehicle if he first meets with Hinayana teachings and receives inspiration to become a Solitary Realizer Arhat, and he enters the Mahayana path if he meets with Mahayana teachings first.

Gyaltsab je says in the ***Ornament of the Essence***:

*That which is capable of serving as the cause of any of the three vehicles' realizations through the condition [of listening, contemplating, and meditating on one of the three vehicles' Dharma] is called 'non-definite nature'.*

**c. A sentient being who lacks a nature, i.e., the potential to attain liberation or Buddhahood**

A sentient being who lacks a nature can be categorized into different types. Asanga presents these types in his ***Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*** (Skt.: ***Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra***, Tib: ***mdo sde rgyan***)

*Some exclusively perform negative actions,*



*Some have destroyed all their positive qualities,  
Some lack the virtue concordant with liberation,  
[And there are those who] have inferior positive  
qualities [but] lack the cause.*

Based on Asanga's quote cited above, Geshe Pema Gyaltzen's commentary ***Heart-Jewel that Delights Those of Clear Understanding*** (Tib: ***blo gsal dga' bskyed snying gi nor bu***) describes four or five types of sentient beings who lack a nature:

*There are many sentient beings who do not possess the above-mentioned nature: (1) sentient beings who only engage in negative actions, (2) some who destroy their white root-virtue with anger, (3) some in whose mental continuum there is no virtue that is concordant with liberation, and (4) some who, despite having inferior virtue in their mental continuum, do not possess the potential that is the seed of the uncontaminated mind in their continuum.*

*With regard to the first three types [of sentient beings], even though they do have a little root virtue, since it is conjoined with adverse conditions such as afflictions, etc., however much they try to activate the root-virtue it does not increase on account of the presence of these adverse conditions. Hence, they do not possess Evolving Nature.*

*With regard to the fourth type, since they lack the seed of the uncontaminated mind and can never attain liberation [as a result], they do not possess Naturally Abiding Nature.*



*Some scriptures also describe five types of beings who do not possess a nature: four types whose nature is temporarily severed and one type whose nature is permanently severed. [In this case the last line of Asanga's verse from the **Ornament for Mahayana Sutras** that sets forth beings who do not possess a nature is interpreted differently, for it does not describe just one type of sentient being, i.e., those who do not possess Naturally Abiding Nature. Instead,] it describes two types. The last line would then mean: "[And there are those who] have inferior positive qualities [and those who] lack the cause."*

Gyaltsab je says in the **Ornament of the Essence**:

*That which cannot be nourished is called 'lack of a nature'.*

Panchen Sonam Drakpa continues his exposition on Buddha Nature according to the Cittamātra school by citing someone's objection:

- Someone objects to interpreting the above-mentioned quote from Maitreya's **Ornament for the Mahayana Sutra** to mean that there are 'sentient beings who lack a nature', for that would contradict another quote from the **Ornament for the Mahayana Sutra**:

*Even though suchness is in all [sentient beings]  
Without distinction, when it becomes pure,  
It is Buddhahood. Therefore,  
All migratory beings are endowed with its essence.*

The explanation of 'sentient beings who lack a nature' would contradict the latter quote from the **Ornament**

**for the Mahayana Sutras** because that quote indicates that *all* sentient beings are endowed with the *Sugatagarbha* or the Essence of the One Gone to Bliss, i.e., Buddha Nature.

Our response to this objection is that (according to the Cittamātra School Following Scripture) the quote from the **Ornament for the Mahayana Sutra** does not indicate that *all* sentient beings possess Buddha Nature, but that all sentient being's minds are naturally endowed with the essence of clear light. To be naturally endowed with the essence of clear light means that their afflictive and cognitive obstructions are adventitious/extrinsic and do not reside in the nature of their minds.

- Just as the proponents of the Cittamātra School assert that *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is impermanent, some Tibetans assert that the obstructed clear and knowing aspect of the mind (which is also impermanent) constitutes *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*. They assert this because Maitreya says in his **Sublime Continuum** (Skt. *Uttaratantra*, Tib: *rgyud bla ma*)

*Just as an expert, seeking to get honey  
Amidst swarms of bees,  
Having seen the honey skillfully separates it  
From the swarms of bees.*

*Likewise, the great sages with omniscient sublime  
vision,  
Having seen Buddha Nature analogous to honey,  
Irreversibly eliminate its obstructions  
Which are analogous to bees.*

*Just as the person who sought to get the honey  
surrounded*

*By myriads of bees, removed the honey and procured it  
as planned,  
Likewise, the uncontaminated awareness present in all  
embodied beings is analogous to honey,  
And the Buddhas, who are experts in conquering  
afflictions analogous to bees, are like the person.*

Also, Nagarjuna says in the **Collection of Hymns** (Tib:  
**bstod tshogs**):

*From the goodness of the mind Buddhas will arise.  
I bow down to my mind.*

Our response is that this is not the meaning of these quotes,  
for they have to be explained based upon *Naturally Abiding  
Buddha Nature*, that is, the permanent sphere of reality  
(emptiness) of the mind. This is explained below.

### **The refutation of the Cittamātra School in Arya Vimuktisena's *Illuminating [the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]***

This section of the **General Meaning** presents Arya  
Vimuktisena's refutation of the Cittamātra view of Buddha  
Nature, according to his commentary ***Illuminating [the  
Perfection of Wisdom Sutras in] Twenty-Thousand  
[Verses]***.

Panchen Sonam Drakpa starts his presentation of the  
refutation by making the following statement:

Regarding the subject, the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom, it follows that it is not *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because it does not accord with the meaning of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*. It does not accord with the meaning of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because there is no sense in which the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom is a 'naturally abiding' phenomenon.

In other words, if the proponents of the Cittamātra School claim that the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has not been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, Arya Vimuktisena argues that they have to explain the meaning of the word "Naturally" that is part of the term "*Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*".

From ***Illuminating [the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]***:

*[The proponents of the Cittamātra School] have to explain what the word "Naturally", in "Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature", means.*

- Someone (a proponent of the Cittamātra School) says that the reason of the previous 'consequence' is not established, i.e., it is not correct to say that the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom does *not* accord with the meaning of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, because the word "naturally" is synonymous with cause.

From ***Illuminating [the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]***:

*Someone says [that the term "natural" is] synonymous with cause.*

Here, the argument of one proponent of the Cittamātra School is that the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has not been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because "Naturally" in the term "*Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*" is synonymous with cause. It is synonymous with cause because the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has not been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma is the cause of Arya realizations. Consequently, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* refers to 'Buddha Nature that abides as a cause'.

Arya Vimuktisena's response to this assertion is:

Regarding the subject, *Evolving Buddha Nature*, it follows that it is also *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because it is Buddha Nature that abides as a cause.

Here, Arya Vimuktisena argues that the above claim by a proponent of the Cittamātra School leads to the absurdity that *Evolving Buddha Nature* is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, which cannot be accepted by the proponents of the Cittamātra School, for they hold that *Evolving* and *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* are contradictory.

From ***Illuminating [the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]***:

*Since [Evolving Buddha Nature] is properly cultivated by conditions, what is the difference in terms of the meaning? [Alternatively,] if [one asserts that the term "natural"] is synonymous with dharmatā (i.e., emptiness) there is no fault.*

Arya Vimuktisena asserts that "naturally" is synonymous with dharmatā or emptiness. Hence, the meaning of the term "*Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*" is 'Buddha Nature abiding

as emptiness'. His assertion is in accordance with the Madhyamika School since the proponents of the Madhyamika hold that *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* constitutes the emptiness of sentient beings' mental consciousness.

### **Explanation of our own system, the Madhyamika School**

This section is further categorized into three subtopics:

1. Describing the nature (meaning/sense) of Buddha Nature
2. Describing the categories of Buddha Nature
3. Describing the signs of having awakened Buddha Nature

### **Describing the nature (meaning/sense) of Buddha Nature**

The 'nature' (Tib: *ngo bo*) of a phenomenon refers to its meaning, its sense, or possibly its definition. But in the **General Meaning** the main purpose of citing the nature of a phenomenon is to provide students with a general idea of the phenomenon it delineates and not necessarily with a definition that withstands logical analysis. A definition that withstands logical analysis is provided in Panchen Sonam Drakpa's **Decisive Analysis**.

In the case of the nature (meaning/sense) of Buddha Nature cited in the **General Meaning**, Panchen Sonam Drakpa negates it as the definition of Buddha Nature in his **Decisive Analysis** because it does not withstand logical analysis. Nonetheless, it is cited here, for it enables students to develop a general understanding of Buddha Nature.

The nature (meaning/sense) of Buddha Nature according to the **General Meaning** is: a sentient being's nature which, when its state is transformed, is suitable to become the

*Svabhavakaya* (Nature Body) or the *Rupakaya* (Form Body) of a Buddha.

## Describing the categories of Buddha Nature

According to the proponents of the Madhyamika, Buddha Nature has two categories:

- a. *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*
- b. *Evolving Buddha Nature*

Maitreya says in his **Sublime Continuum** (Skt. *Uttaratantra*, Tib: *rgyud bla ma*):

*Similar to a treasure and the fruit of a tree,  
Buddha Nature should be known as [having] two aspects,  
That which abides naturally since beginningless time and  
That which [becomes] supreme through proper cultivation.*

This verse presents the two types of Buddha Nature by comparing *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* with a hidden treasure and *Evolving Buddha Nature* with the fruit of a tree.

Before he presents the verse cited above, Maitreya describes Buddha Nature in the fourth chapter of his **Sublime Continuum** by way of nine different examples. The 'hidden treasure' refers to the fifth and the 'fruit of a tree' to the sixth of these examples.

Maitreya says that most sentient beings are not aware of the ultimate reality of their mental consciousness nor that this lack of true/inherent existence facilitates the change and development of their mental consciousness. Therefore, he compares *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* to a precious natural treasure that is hidden beneath the house of a poor man who does not know that it is there.



*Evolving Buddha Nature* refers to (1) sentient beings' mental consciousness itself or to (2) the potential of that mental consciousness to remove obstructions and achieve the realizations of a Buddha. A sentient being's mental consciousness is that which can be developed and transformed into the mind of a Buddha owing to its potential and its lack of true/inherent existence. However, such a transformation can only take place if one listens, contemplates, and meditates on the Dharma. Therefore, Maitreya compares *Evolving Buddha Nature* to the fruit of a tree, such as a mango, with a seed that has the potential to grow into a big tree provided one creates the necessary conditions for such growth.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is suitable to become the *Dharmakaya* (Truth Body) of a Buddha. Of the two types of *Evolving Buddha Nature* - (1) sentient beings' mental consciousness and (2) the potential of sentient beings' mental consciousness to remove obstructions and achieve the realizations of a Buddha - it is the potential that is suitable to become the *Rupakaya* (Form Body) of a Buddha.

Maitreya says in his ***Sublime Continuum***:

*It is asserted that from these two types of nature,  
One attains the three Kayas of a Buddha;  
The first Kaya through the first  
Through the second the latter two [Kayas].*

The three *Kayas* of a Buddha are (1) the *Dharmakaya* (Truth Body), (2) the *Sambhoghakaya* (Enjoyment Body), and the *Nirmanakaya* (Emanation Body), with the last two being the two categories of the *Rupakaya*.



The verse cited above explains that the first *Kaya*, the *Dharmakaya*, is attained in dependence on the first of the two natures, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, while the two *Rupakayas* are attained in dependence on the second, *Evolving Buddha Nature* (i.e., the potential of sentient beings' mental consciousness).

Since *Evolving Buddha Nature* refers not only to sentient beings' mental consciousness but also to the *potential* of the mental consciousness to remove obstructions and achieve the realizations of a Buddha, Arya Vimuktisena says that the *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* asserted by the proponents of the Cittamātra School is *Evolving Buddha Nature* and merely nominal *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, according to the Madhyamika School.

In other words, as mentioned before, the proponents of the Cittamātra School assert the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma to be *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*. The proponents of the Madhyamika School also assert the existence of such a seed, for (like the proponents of the Cittamātra School) they assert it to refer to the potential of sentient beings' mental consciousness to remove obstructions and achieve the realizations of a Buddha, and therefore to be Buddha Nature. However, they do not assert it to be *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* (like the proponents of the Cittamātra School) but *Evolving Buddha Nature*. Thus, according to the Madhyamika School, the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that has not been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma is merely nominal *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* and not actual *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*.

Gyaltsab je says in his ***Ornament of the Essence***:

*[Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature] is that which is suitable to become a Dharmakaya (Truth Body); it is also the dharmatā that is the lack of true existence of sentient beings' minds. The Dharmakaya into which it transforms is the very pure nature that is devoid of all stains. However, it is not taught that the pure nature of sentient beings, having transformed, becomes a Buddha's meditative equipoise.*

*The existence of the potential [based] on sentient beings' minds that enables separation from stains and generation of Arya realizations is established by reasoning. The [potential] itself is posited by the condition of hearing [contemplating, and meditating] and nourished by the condition of hearing [contemplating, and meditating]. Therefore, when the transformation of the "nature that is properly cultivated [by conditions]" (i.e., the potential) is completed, it is suitable to become a Rupakaya. [The potential] is that which is posited to be Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature by the proponents of the Cittamātra . Acharya Arya [Vimuktisena] asserts that [according to the Madhyamika School, the potential] is nominal Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature and actual Evolving Nature.*

After citing the verses from the **Sublime Continuum**, Panchen Sonam Drakpa continues his description of the two categories of Buddha Nature by explaining that *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is the support (Tib: *rten*) of *Evolving Buddha Nature* while *Evolving Buddha Nature* is that which is supported (Tib: *brten pa*). *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is the support of *Evolving Buddha Nature* because when *Evolving Buddha Nature* (a sentient being's mental consciousness) takes to mind *Naturally Abiding Buddha*

*Nature* (the lack of true/inherent existence of that sentient being's mental consciousness) the *Evolving Buddha Nature* develops.

In other words, a mental consciousness advances and progresses in dependence upon perceiving its own lack of true/inherent existence (*Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*).

Furthermore, *Naturally Abiding* and *Evolving Buddha Nature* exist only in the continuums of sentient beings; they do not exist in the continuums of Buddhas. Likewise, Hearer Nature does not exist in the continuums of Hearer Arhats, Solitary Realizer Nature does not exist in the continuums of Solitary Realizer Arhats, and Mahayana nature does not exist in the continuums of Mahayana Arhats, i.e., Buddhas.

Maitreya says in the ***Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras***:

*Natural and evolved,  
Support and supported,  
They exist and do not exist; their qualities  
Should be known to be for the sake of freeing [sentient  
beings].*

The meaning of these four lines is that *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is the support and *Evolving Buddha Nature* that which is supported. The two types of Buddha Nature exist in the continuums of sentient beings and do not exist in the continuums of Buddhas. And their qualities are that they facilitate the attainment of liberation and enlightenment.

As mentioned before, of the two natures, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* or (as it is also called) 'Element of the Essence of the One Thus Gone (Skt.: *Sugathagarbha*, Tib: *kham s bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po*) refers to the dharmatā of sentient beings' mental consciousness.

Buddha Shakyamuni says in the ***Flower Garland Sutra*** (Skt.: Avataṃsakasūtra, Tib: ***mdo phal chen***)

*Pay heed! The Buddha Nature of Bodhisattvas, children of the Victorious Ones, is natural clear light, vast as space, being mainly the sphere of reality. Bodhisattvas who abide in such [nature] arose as past Bhagavan Buddhas, will arise as future Bhagavan Buddhas, have arisen as present Bhagavan Buddhas.*

Buddha Shakyamuni says in the ***Middling Perfection of Wisdom Sutra***/ **[The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] Twenty Thousand [Verses]** (Tib: ***nyi khri***):

*Subhuti, Bodhisattvas should train in non-attachment and the non-reality of all phenomena because they do not have conceptions and discursive thoughts.*

The meaning of this sutric passage is explained in Arya Vimuktisena's ***Illuminating [the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]***:

*Conceptions and discursive thoughts adhere to things and their characteristics. Without those there is no attachment. Non-reality is the suchness of all phenomena. Therefore, since the sphere of reality is the cause of realizing all Arya Dharmas, Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature is the support of practice.*

## **Describing the signs of having awakened Buddha Nature**

The Buddha says in a sutra:

*Just as one knows [the presence of] fire from [the presence of] smoke and  
[The presence] of water from [the presence of] water birds,*

*Wise Bodhisattvas know [the awakening of]  
Buddha Nature from the signs.*

The signs of having awakened Buddha Nature are equivalent to the signs of having awakened Mahayana Nature, even though Buddha Nature and Mahayana Nature are not equivalent. This is explained below.

Like the proponents of the Cittamātra , the proponents of the Madhyamika School assert (1) Hearer Nature, (2) Solitary Realizer Nature, and (3) Mahayana Nature in addition to Buddha Nature. However, these three differ from the Hearer Nature, etc., according to the Cittamātra School.

### ***Hearer Nature***

Hearer Nature can be categorized into (1) *Naturally Abiding Hearer Nature* and (2) *Evolving Hearer Nature*. *Naturally Abiding Hearer Nature* refers to the emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Hearer Nature but not yet attained the state of a Hearer Arhat. *Evolving Hearer Nature* refers to (a) the mental consciousness or (b) the potential of that mental consciousness to remove afflictive obstructions and become a Hearer Arhat, in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Hearer Nature but not yet attained the state of a Hearer Arhat.

The emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of such a practitioner is both *Naturally Abiding Hearer Nature* and *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, while the mental consciousness itself and its potential are both *Evolving Hearer Nature* and *Evolving Buddha Nature*.

As before, a practitioner who has awakened Hearer Nature constitutes a practitioner who is highly determined to practice the Hearer path and become a Hearer Arhat. Upon receiving Hinayana teachings and inspiration through the example of Hearer practitioners or Hearer Arhats, he experiences great joy and exhibits physical reactions such as his eyes filling with tears and his body hair standing on end.

### ***Solitary Realizer Nature***

Solitary Realizer Nature can be categorized into (1) *Naturally Abiding Solitary Realizer Nature* and (2) *Evolving Solitary Realizer Nature*. *Naturally Abiding Solitary Realizer Nature* refers to the emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Solitary Realizer Nature but not yet attained the state of a Solitary Realizer Arhat. *Evolving Solitary Realizer Nature* refers to (a) the mental consciousness or (2) the potential of that mental consciousness to remove afflictive obstructions and become a Solitary Realizer Arhat, in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Solitary Realizer Nature but not yet attained the state of a Solitary Realizer Arhat.

The emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of such a practitioner is both *Naturally Abiding Solitary Realizer Nature* and *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, while the mental consciousness itself and its potential are both *Evolving Solitary Realizer Nature* and *Evolving Buddha Nature*.

As before, a practitioner who has awakened Solitary Realizer Nature constitutes a practitioner who is highly determined to practice the Solitary Realizer path and become a Solitary Realizer Arhat. Upon receiving Hinayana teachings and inspiration through the example of Solitary Realizer practitioners or Solitary Realizer Arhats, he experiences great



joy and exhibits physical reactions such as his eyes filling with tears and his body hair standing on end.

### ***Mahayana Nature***

Mahayana Nature can be categorized into (1) *Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature* and (2) *Evolving Mahayana Nature*. *Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature* refers to the emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Mahayana Nature but not yet attained the state of a Mahayana Arhat, i.e., a Buddha. *Evolving Mahayana Nature* refers to (a) the mental consciousness or (b) the potential of that mental consciousness to remove afflictive and cognitive obstructions and become a Buddha, in the continuum of a practitioner who has awakened Mahayana Nature but not yet attained Buddhahood.

The emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of such a practitioner is both *Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature* and *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, while the mental consciousness itself and its potential are both *Evolving Mahayana Nature* and *Evolving Buddha Nature*.

A practitioner who has awakened Mahayana Nature constitutes a person who has cultivated great compassion, who is highly determined to practice the Mahayana path and become a Buddha, who is able to endure any type of hardship for the benefit of others, and who demonstrates intense diligence when engaging in the deeds of a Bodhisattva. The cultivation of great compassion, being highly determined to practice the Mahayana path and become a Buddha, and so forth are explained to be the signs of having awakened both Mahayana Nature and Buddha Nature.



As mentioned before, Maitreya says in his ***Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras***:

*Before [engaging in] training, compassion and  
Determination and endurance and  
The proper deeds of virtue  
Should be known as the signs of [having awakened  
Mahayana] Nature.*

However, there is a difference between Mahayana Nature and Buddha Nature. Whatever is Mahayana Nature is necessarily Buddha Nature, but whatever is Buddha Nature is *not* necessarily Mahayana Nature. For instance, the emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of a person who has no interest in the Dharma is Buddha Nature (*Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*) but not Mahayana Nature. Likewise, the mental consciousness and its potential (*i.e.*, the potential to remove afflictive and cognitive obstructions and become a Buddha) in the continuum of such a person is Buddha Nature (*Evolving Buddha Nature*) but not Mahayana nature. Neither of these are Mahayana Nature because they exist in the continuum of a person who has not yet awakened his Mahayana Nature.

Therefore, although in order to be endowed with Mahayana Nature a person must have *awakened* Mahayana Nature, a person does not have to awaken Buddha Nature in order to be endowed with Buddha Nature. This is because all sentient beings have Buddha Nature.

Gyaltsab je says in his ***Ornament of the Essence***:

*The potential to eliminate sentient beings' obstructions and generate supramundane paths is labelled "Evolving Nature". It can be categorized into three types of nature, indefinite nature, and so forth. [Those categories] are*

*provisional; it should be understood that ultimately all sentient beings have Buddha Nature.*

Like the proponents of the Cittamātra School, the proponents of the Madhyamika also assert three types of being: (1) someone who is endowed with Hearer Nature (Tib: *nyan thos kyi rigs can*) which refers to a practitioner who has awakened Hearer Nature, (2) someone who is endowed with Solitary Realizer Nature (Tib: *rang rgyal gyi rigs can*), which refers to a practitioner who has awakened Solitary Realizer Nature, and someone who is endowed with Mahayana Nature (Tib: *theg chen gyi rigs can*), which refers to a practitioner who has awakened Mahayana Nature.

Furthermore, the proponents of the Madhyamika School also assert the existence of (1) a sentient being who is definite with regard to the nature of one of the three vehicles (Tib: *theg pa gsum po so sor rigs nges pa'i sems can*) and (2) a sentient being who is not definite with regard to the nature of one of the three vehicles (Tib: *theg pa gsum gang du yang rigs ma nges pa*) - explaining both types in the same way as the proponents of the Cittamātra . However, (unlike the proponents of the Cittamātra School Following Scripture but like most of the proponents of the Cittamātra School Following Reasoning) the proponents of the Madhyamika do not accept the existence of a sentient being who lacks a nature, i.e., the potential to attain liberation or Buddhahood (Tib: *rigs chad kyi sems can*). They do not accept the existence of such a sentient being because, as mentioned above, they assert that all sentient beings have Buddha Nature and will eventually attain Buddhahood.

The assertion that all sentient have Buddha Nature is based on the reasons presented by Maitreya in the **Sublime Continuum** (Skt. *Uttaratantra*, Tib: *rgyud bla ma*):

*Since the perfect Buddha Kaya is all-pervasive,  
Since suchness cannot be differentiated, and  
Since all sentient beings have Buddha Nature,  
They all possess Buddha Essence.*

The meaning of this verse is: all sentient beings possess Buddha Essence, that is, all sentient being will attain the state of a Buddha (1) because the enlightened activity of Buddhas is all-pervasive, (2) because the emptiness of the omniscient mental consciousness of a Buddha and the emptiness of the obstructed mental consciousness of a sentient beings are not of a different nature/entity, and (3) because the minds of all sentient beings lack true/inherent existence and are thus endowed with Buddha Nature.

However, this seems to contradict sutric passages which indicate that there are sentient beings who do not have Buddha Nature. Asanga cites such a sutric passage in his ***Commentary on the Sublime Continuum*** (Tib: *rgyu bla thogs 'grel*) and explains that this sutra cannot be taken literally and requires interpretation:

*[From the sutra:] "Then he said that those who delight in vicious actions (Tib: log sred can) do not thoroughly pass beyond sorrow."*

*What is explained here is that the cause of beings who delight in vicious actions is their having a hostile attitude towards Mahayana Dharma. In order to reverse such a hostile attitude [the Buddha] taught [this sutra] with the intent to indicate a different time. Since all sentient beings possess naturally pure Buddha Nature, it is not fitting that they never become pure. For that reason, having realized that all sentient beings without distinction are suitable to become pure, [the Buddha] says:*

*“Although beginningless, it possesses an end,  
The bearer of the naturally pure, permanent  
attribute:  
[Because its] outside is concealed by a cover since  
beginningless time, it is unseen,  
Like a concealed golden statue.”*

In general, it is explained that a hostile attitude towards Mahayana Dharma causes those delighting in negative actions to not attain enlightenment for a long time. In order to reverse such an attitude the Buddha literally says that beings who delight in non-virtuous actions will not thoroughly pass beyond sorrow, i.e., attain the enlightened state of a Buddha. However, the Buddha says that they will not attain the enlightened state of a Buddha with the intent to indicate 'a different time' (Tib: *dus gzhan*). He intends to indicate 'a different time', for his intended meaning is that sentient beings who delight in negative actions will not attain enlightenment *for a long time*. Therefore, this sutric passage is considered to be a teaching that requires interpretation. It is a teaching that requires interpretation because it is endowed with the three aspects of a teaching that cannot be taken literally. The three aspects are:

- i. Intended meaning
- ii. Purpose [of the teaching]
- iii. Damage to the explicit [literal meaning of the sutric passage]

As mentioned above, the **intended meaning** (Tib: *dgongs gzhi*) of the sutric passage is that those who feel hostile towards Mahayana Dharma will not attain Buddhahood for *a long time*. The **purpose** (Tib: *dgos pa*) is to reverse the hostile attitude towards Mahayana Dharma, and the **damage** to the explicit [i.e., the literal meaning of the sutric passage] (Tib:

*dn̄gos la gn̄od byed*) is the fact that all sentient beings are the focus of the enlightened activity of the Buddhas and that they all possess Buddha Nature.

Gyaltsab je says in his **Ornament of the Essence**:

*Naturally abiding nature, which was explained before, serves as the support of the realizations of the different vehicles. It is suitable to be transformed into the support of the realization of any vehicle. Therefore, one applies to it the convention of 'the provisional three natures' or 'the indefinite nature'. However, a complete lack of Buddha Nature is not asserted because [Asanga] cites a sutra in [his] commentary on the **Sublime Continuum** and establishes that [the sutra's] explanation of the lack of Buddha Nature has another thought behind it [i.e., needs to be interpreted].*

[From Asanga's **Commentary on the Sublime Continuum**]:

*"Then he said that those who delight in vicious actions do not thoroughly pass beyond sorrow." What is explained here is that the cause of beings who delight in vicious actions is their having a hostile attitude towards Mahayana Dharma. In order to reverse such a hostile attitude [the Buddha] taught [this sutra] with the intent to indicate a different time. Since all sentient beings possess naturally pure Buddha Nature, it is not fitting that they should never become pure. For that reason, having realized that all sentient beings without distinction are suitable to become pure, [the Buddha] says:*

*Although beginningless, it possesses an  
end,  
The bearer of the naturally pure,  
permanent attribute:  
[Because its] outside is concealed by a  
cover since beginningless time, it is  
unseen,  
Like a concealed golden statue.*

*The meaning of this is that the Buddha's description of  
the lack of Buddha Nature has (1) an intended meaning,  
(2) a purpose, and (3) damage to the explicit [literal  
meaning]*

*The intended meaning is that for a long time -  
innumerable eons - the path of liberation will not be  
generated in the continuum [of a person who delights in  
vicious actions].*

*The purpose is to reverse the hostile attitude towards  
Mahayana Dharma, for a hostile attitude towards  
Mahayana Dharma causes those delighting in vicious  
actions to not attain enlightenment for long time.*

*The damage to the explicit [literal meaning of the sutra]  
is that it would be unreasonable for some sentient  
beings not to purify their stains because (1) all sentient  
beings have naturally pure Buddha Nature and (2) all  
sentient beings are affected by the Buddhas' enlightened  
activity. This is because being born as a fortunate being  
in a state of high rebirth is [the result of] the Buddhas'  
enlightened activity and there is no sentient being who  
has not attained a high rebirth [at least] once.*

However, since all sentient beings are the focus of the  
enlightened activity of the Buddhas, and the number of



Buddhas who have come to this world equals the amount of dust particles in the bed of the river Ganges, what is the reason that some sentient beings, despite being endowed with *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, have not yet attained Nirvana?

The reason is that those sentient beings are affected by the four hindrances to Buddha Nature (Tib: *rigs kyi nyes dmigs bzhi*).

The four hindrances to Buddha Nature are:

1. having very strong afflictions
2. being influenced by bad companions
3. being deprived of the necessities of life, etc.
4. being under the control of other sentient beings

Arya Vimuktisena says in his ***Illuminating the [Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]*** (Skt. ***Abhisamayālaṅkāravṛtti***, Tib: ***nyi khri snang ba***):

*Someone asks, if there is that type of naturally pure Buddha Nature, why have living beings who are endowed with Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature not yet gone beyond sorrow, even though Buddhas numerous as dust particles of the river Ganges, who have gone beyond sorrow, remain in Samsara that is beginningless? [The reason is] that they possess the four hindrances. The four hindrances are afflictions, bad companions, deprivation, and being under the control of others.*

Gyaltsab je says in his ***Ornament of the Essence***:

*If all sentient beings have Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature, why is it that there are still limitless living beings*



*who have not yet gone beyond sorrow, even though limitless Buddha have come?*

*It is because of possessing the four hindrances to Buddha Nature: having very strong afflictions, being influenced by bad companions, being deprived of the necessities of life, etc., and being under the control of other sentient beings.*

This completes a general presentation of naturally abiding and *Evolving Buddha Nature* according to Panchen Sonam Drakpa's **General Meaning**.

## **The two types of Buddha Nature – explanations & debates – from Panchen Sonam Drakpa's *Decisive Analysis***

Next follows a presentation of the explanations and debates related to the two types of Buddha Nature that are set forth in Panchen Sonam Drakpa's *Decisive Analysis*:

Elaborating on the verses of the **Ornament** that present the thirteen types of Buddha Nature:

*The six qualities of realization...*

and so forth, Panchen Sonam Drakpa sets forth (1) a syllogism and (2) analysis.

### **A syllogism**

Regarding the subject, the emptinesses of the thirteen practices of a Bodhisattva, they are *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that are the support of Mahayana practices (1) because they are the emptinesses of Bodhisattva awarenesses that are their support-dharma and (2) because they are the support-basis of Mahayana practices<sup>6</sup>.

### **Analysis**

The section of the analysis consists of:

1) Explaining Buddha Nature according to the Cittamātra system

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<sup>6</sup> Mahayana practices (Tib: *theg chen sgrub pa*) refer to Mahayana paths in the continuum of Bodhisattvas. The emptiness of Mahayana practices are the support or the support-basis of these paths since the paths develop or evolve by meditating on their own emptiness. Mahayana practices, in turn, are that which is supported or the support-dharma of the emptiness of these Bodhisattva paths.

## 2) Explaining Buddha Nature according to the Madhyamika system

### **Explaining Buddha Nature according to the Cittamātra system**

- Someone says that *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* and *Evolving Buddha Nature* are not contradictory because the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of sentient beings is both *Naturally Abiding* and *Evolving Buddha Nature*.

Our response is that this is not correct because Gyaltsab je explains in his ***Ornament of the Essence*** that the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of sentient beings whose seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom has not been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* while the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of sentient beings whose seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom has been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma is *Evolving Buddha Nature*. Therefore, the two types of Buddha Nature are contradictory.

- With regard to the last response, someone says: "it follows that from the Mahayana path of accumulation onwards there is no *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because of your above response. If you accept (that from the Mahayana path of accumulation onwards there is no *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*), it follows that from the Mahayana path of accumulation onwards there is no *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice because you accept (that from the

Mahayana path of accumulation onwards there is no *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*).

If you accept (that from the Mahayana path of accumulation onwards there is no *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that serves as support of the Mahayana practice), it follows that the proponents of the Madhyamika School do not assert *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice because the proponents of the Cittamātra School do not assert *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice."

Our response is that there is no pervasion, *i.e.*, if the proponents of the Cittamātra School do not assert *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice, this does not mean that the proponents of the Madhyamika School do not assert *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice.

If you were to accept that the proponents of the Cittamātra School assert *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice, it would absurdly follow that according to the Cittamātra School, the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation would be *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice.

The seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation would be *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice (1) because such a seed exists and (2) because (according to the Cittamātra School) the emptiness of the Mahayana path of preparation is not *Naturally Abiding*

*Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice. According to the Cittamātra School, the emptiness of the Mahayana path of preparation is not *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice because (according to the Cittamātra School) *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is impermanent.

If you were to accept that the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice, it would follow that the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation is the support of the Mahayana practice. If you were to accept that the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation is the support of the Mahayana practice, it would follow that the Mahayana path of preparation itself is the support of the Mahayana practice. If you were to accept that the Mahayana path of preparation itself is the support of the Mahayana practice, it would follow that the Mahayana path of preparation is its own support. This does not make any sense!

Furthermore, (according to the Cittamātra School) *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* and *Evolving Buddha Nature* are contradictory since *Evolving Buddha Nature* is not *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*. *Evolving Buddha Nature* is not *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because the following 'consequence' from Arya Vimuktisena's ***Illuminating the [Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]*** is a 'consequence' the basic premise of which the proponents of the Cittamātra do not accept.

The 'consequence' is:

Regarding the subject, *Evolving Buddha Nature*, it is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, because it is the cause of attaining Arya realizations.

(The basic premise of this consequence is: *Evolving Buddha Nature* is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*)

- Someone says that there is no fault in asserting that *Naturally Abiding* and *Evolving Buddha Nature* are not contradictory because, even though proponents of the Cittamātra School accept that *Evolving Buddha Nature* in the continuum of practitioners on the Mahayana path is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, proponents of the Cittamātra School maintain that whatever is *Evolving Buddha Nature* is not necessarily *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*.

Our response is that you have to absurdly assert that according to the proponents of the Cittamātra School, whatever is *Evolving Buddha Nature* is necessarily *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because you claim that according to the proponents of the Cittamātra School, *Evolving Buddha Nature* in the continuum of practitioners on the Mahayana path is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*.

Furthermore, you have to absurdly assert that according to the proponents of the Cittamātra School, whatever is *Evolving Buddha Nature* is necessarily *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, (1) because you assert that in general, *Evolving Buddha Nature* and *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* are not contradictory, and (2) because you have to assert that Bodhisattvas on the tenth ground (bhumi) have *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* in their continuums.

According to our own system, the Cittamātra School, the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is: (1) a nature

that is suitable to become the Kaya of a Buddha and (2) has not been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma.

The definition of *Evolving Buddha Nature* is: (1) a nature that is suitable to become the Kaya of a Buddha and (2) has been nourished by listening, contemplating, and meditating on the Dharma.

### **Explaining Buddha Nature according to the Madhyamika system:**

- Someone says that the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is: "emptiness of a mind that has stains."

This is not correct because the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' (Tib: *rgyun mtha' bar chad med lam*) is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* but not emptiness of a mind that has stains.

Please note that 'the uninterrupted at the end of the continuum' refers to a meditative equipoise that is a direct antidote of and thus eliminates the *subtlest* cognitive obstructions in the continuum of a tenth ground Bodhisattva. It is the last moment of consciousness of a Bodhisattva because a moment later, the Bodhisattva simultaneously attains the cessation of the subtlest cognitive obstructions and becomes a Buddha. This is why it is called 'path at the end of the continuum'; it is the path of a living being who has reached the end of his continuum as a sentient being.

The emptiness of the 'uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is not emptiness of a mind that has stains, because the 'uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum'



does not have stains. It does not have stains since a Bodhisattva on 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is free from cognitive obstructions. This is because he abides in the direct antidote to the subtlest cognitive obstructions. Although he has not yet attained the cessation of these obstructions (and thus is not yet omniscient), obstructions are no longer present in his mental continuum.

- Someone says that the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is the emptiness of an awareness that is that emptiness' support-phenomenon and has stains. This is because 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' has stains. 'The uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' has stains since it is not free from adventitious stains. It is not free from adventitious stains because its emptiness is not emptiness that is free from adventitious stains. Its emptiness is not emptiness that is free from adventitious stains because Gyalsab Je says in his ***Ornament of the Essence*** that whoever is a person who actualizes emptiness that is free from adventitious stains is necessarily a person who actualizes the *Dharmakaya* (Truth Body) of a Buddha.

Our response is that there is no pervasion, *i.e.*, even though whoever is a person actualizing emptiness that is free from adventitious stains is necessarily someone who actualizes the *Dharmakaya* of a Buddha, this does not mean that the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is not emptiness that is free from adventitious stains.

If you assert that there is a pervasion then it absurdly follows that the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the

continuum' is not itself (*i.e.*, that the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is not the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum'), because a person who actualizes the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is necessarily someone who actualizes the *Dharmakaya* of a Buddha. This is because a person who actualizes emptiness is necessarily someone who actualizes the *Dharmakaya* of a Buddha.

Please note that a person who *actualizes* emptiness refers to a person who is able to spontaneously and effortlessly work for the benefit of sentient beings *while* being absorbed in the meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness. Therefore, whoever actualizes emptiness is necessarily a Buddha. This is because whoever is able to spontaneously and effortlessly work for the benefit of sentient beings *while* being absorbed in the meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness has necessarily eliminated all obstructions and attained enlightenment.

In short, it is important to understand that although the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is emptiness that is free from adventitious stains, this does not mean that a Bodhisattva on 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' *actualizes* the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum'. This is because whoever *actualizes* the emptiness of any phenomenon (the emptiness of 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum', the emptiness of the Mahayana path of preparation, the emptiness of a vase, etc.) is necessarily a Buddha.

- Someone says that Bodhisattvas on 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' have attained freedom

that is free from adventitious stains, because they are free from adventitious stains.

Our response is that there is no pervasion, *i.e.*, even though Bodhisattvas are free from adventitious stains, this does not mean that they attained freedom that is free from adventitious stains.

- Someone asserts that Bodhisattvas on 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' have attained *freedom that is free from adventitious stains*, because the *truth of cessation* of Bodhisattvas on 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is freedom that is free from adventitious stains. The *truth of cessation* of Bodhisattvas on 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is freedom that is free from adventitious stains (1) because it is free from adventitious stains and (2) because it is a state of freedom.

Our response is that there is no pervasion, *i.e.*, even though the *truth of cessation* of Bodhisattvas on 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is (1) free from adventitious stains and (2) a state of freedom, this does not mean that it is a freedom that is free from adventitious stains.

There is no pervasion because a freedom that is free from adventitious stains refers to the *truth of cessation* of a Buddha.

- Someone asserts that the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is: "emptiness of a mind that has not eliminated stains."

This definition is not correct because neither (1) the emptiness of the mental factor of feeling in the continuum of a

Bodhisattva nor (2) the emptiness of the mind in the continuum of ordinary Devadatta satisfy the definition (even though they are both *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*).

The emptiness of the mental factor of feeling in the continuum of a Bodhisattva does not satisfy the definition because the mental factor of feeling in the continuum of a Bodhisattva is not a mind. It is not a mind because it is a mental factor.

The emptiness of the mind in the continuum of ordinary Devadatta is also not the emptiness of a mind that has not eliminated stains because the emptiness of the mind in the continuum of ordinary Devadatta is not the emptiness of a mind. The emptiness of the mind in the continuum of ordinary Devadatta is not the emptiness of a mind because the emptiness of Devadatta is not the emptiness of a person.

- Someone says that the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of Mahayana practice is: “that which is (1) a sphere of reality (*i.e.*, emptiness) and (2) serves as the support-basis of the Mahayana practice.”

This definition is not correct because the emptiness of the mind of a Buddha satisfies the definition but is not *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*. The emptiness of the mind of a Buddha satisfies the definition because (1) it is a sphere of reality and (2) serves as the support-basis of the Mahayana practice. The emptiness of the mind of a Buddha serves as the ‘support-basis’ (Tib: *theg chen sgrub pa'i rten gzhi byed pa*) of the Mahayana practice because it is the focal object of the Mahayana practice.

- Someone else says that the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of Mahayana practice is: "that which is (1) the emptiness of a Bodhisattva's mind and (2) serves as support-basis of the Mahayana practice."

This definition is not correct because the emptiness of the mental factor of feeling in the continuum of a Bodhisattva, etc., is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* but does not satisfy the definition.

- Someone says that the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is: "that which is (1) the emptiness of a consciousness that is its object-dharma and has not eliminated stains, and which (2), when its state is transformed, is suitable to become the *Svabhavikakaya* (Nature Body) of a Buddha."

This definition is not correct because the emptiness of the mind of a Bodhisattva on 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* but does not satisfy the definition. The emptiness of the mind of a Bodhisattva on 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' does not satisfy the definition, because, when its state is transformed, it is not suitable to become the *Svabhavikakaya* (Nature Body) of a Buddha. When its state is transformed, it is not suitable to become the *Svabhavikakaya* (Nature Body) of a Buddha, because when its state is transformed, it *has become* the *Svabhavikakaya* (Nature Body) of a Buddha.

According to our own system, the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is: that which is (1) the emptiness of a consciousness that is its object of support and has not

eliminated stains, and which (2) is suitable to become the *Svabhavikakaya* (Nature Body) of a Buddha.

The definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice is: that which is (1) the emptiness of the consciousness of a Bodhisattva that is its object of support and (2) serves as the support-basis of the Mahayana practice.

The definition of *Evolving Buddha Nature* is: that which is (1) Buddha Nature and (2) suitable to become a conditioned (*i.e.*, impermanent) Kaya of a Buddha.

- Someone objects to the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* given by our own system by arguing: "Regarding the subject, the emptiness of the awareness that grasps at true/inherent existence, it follows that it is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because it satisfies the definition. The emptiness of the awareness that grasps at true/inherent existence satisfies the definition because the emptiness of the mind that has stains satisfies the definition."

Our response is that there is no pervasion, *i.e.*, even though the emptiness of the mind that has stains satisfies the definition, this does not mean that the emptiness of the awareness that grasps at true/inherent existence satisfies the definition.

If you assert that the awareness that grasps at true/inherent existence satisfies the definition then it absurdly follows that the awareness that grasps at true/inherent existence is suitable to become the *Jnanakaya* (Wisdom Body) of a Buddha. The awareness that grasps at true/inherent existence is suitable to become the *Jnanakaya* (Wisdom Body)



of a Buddha, because the mind that has stains is suitable to become the *Jnanakaya* (Wisdom Body) of a Buddha. You assert the pervasion.

- With regard to the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* posited by our own system, someone presents the following debate: "Regarding the subject, the emptiness of the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation, it follows that it is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because it satisfies the definition of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*. If you accept (that the emptiness of the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*), it follows that the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation is *Evolving Buddha Nature*, because the emptiness of the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*.

If you accept (that the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation is *Evolving Buddha Nature*) it follows that the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation is suitable to become the *Jnanakaya* (Wisdom Body) of a Buddha, because the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation is *Evolving Buddha Nature*. However, it is not correct to accept (that the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation is suitable to become the *Jnanakaya* of a Buddha), because a *Jnanakaya* is necessarily a mental consciousness, whereas the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Buddha is not a mental consciousness.



Yet – the opponent may argue – if the emptiness of the eye consciousness of a Buddha were a *Nature Body of Natural Purity*, it would be correct to assert that the emptiness of the eye consciousness in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* because that emptiness would become the *Nature Body of Natural Purity* of a Buddha.“

Our response is that this needs to be analyzed.

- Someone says that the two, (1) *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice and (2) *Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature* are equivalent.

This is not correct because the emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of a person who has not yet entered a path but who has just awakened Mahayana Nature is (2) *Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature* but not (1) *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* that is the support of the Mahayana practice. The emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of a person who has not yet entered a path but who has just awakened Mahayana Nature is (2) *Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature* because someone who has not yet entered a path but who has just awakened Mahayana Nature has Mahayana Nature in his continuum.

- Concerning the previous assertion, someone argues:  
"Regarding the subject, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation who will definitely enter the Hearer path, it follows that it is *Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature* because the emptiness of the mental consciousness in the continuum of a person who has not yet entered a path but

who has just awakened Mahayana Nature is Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature.

If you accept, I respond by saying: Regarding the subject, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation who will definitely enter the Hearer path, it follows that it is *not* Naturally Abiding Mahayana Nature, because it is Hearer Nature. Regarding the subject, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation who will definitely enter the Hearer path, it follows that it is Hearer Nature, because that Bodhisattva has Hearer Nature in his continuum. If you say that the reason is not established (*i.e.*, that a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation who will definitely enter the Hearer path does not have Hearer Nature in their continuums), we debate: Regarding the subject, a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation who will definitely enter the Hearer path, it follows that he has Hearer Nature in his continuum, because he is 'someone who is endowed with Hearer Nature' (Tib: *nyan thos kyi rigs can*)."

Our response to the last reason is that there is no pervasion (*i.e.*, even though that Bodhisattva is 'someone who is endowed with Hearer Nature', this does not mean that he has Hearer Nature in his continuum.)

If you assert that whoever is 'someone who is endowed with Hearer Nature' necessarily has Hearer Nature in his continuum, you must assert that 'someone who is definite with Mahayana Nature' necessarily has Mahayana Nature in his continuum. If you accept the latter, we debate: Regarding the subject, 'someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature' (Tib: *nyan thos kyi rigs nges*) but who has not yet cultivated great compassion, it follows that he has

Mahayana Nature in his continuum, because he is 'someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature'. You assert the pervasion.

If you accept (that 'someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature' but who has not yet cultivated great compassion has Mahayana Nature in his continuum) we argue: Regarding the subject, 'someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature' but who has not yet cultivated great compassion, it follows that he has awakened Mahayana Nature, because you accept (that 'someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature' but who has not yet cultivated great compassion has Mahayana Nature in his continuum). If you accept (that 'someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature' but who has not yet cultivated great compassion has awakened Mahayana Nature) we debate: Regarding the subject, 'someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature' but who has not yet cultivated great compassion, it follows that he has already attained great compassion, because you accept (that 'someone who is definite with regard to Mahayana Nature' but who has not yet cultivated great compassion has awakened Mahayana Nature). There is a pervasion (*i.e.*, whoever has awakened Mahayana Nature has necessarily attained great compassion) because Maitreya says in his ***Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*** (Skt.: ***Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra***, Tib: ***mdo sde rgyan***):

*Before [engaging in] training, compassion and  
Determination and endurance and  
The proper deeds of virtue  
Should be known as the signs of [having awakened  
Mahayana] Nature.*

- [The Sakya scholar] Rongtikpa says: "The clear and knowing aspect of the mind that possesses stains is

*Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, because it is the substantial cause of the *Jñanakaya* of a Buddha and because Maitreya says in the ***Sublime Continuum*** during the brief explanation:

*Likewise, the great sages with omniscient sublime vision,  
Having seen Buddha Nature analogous to honey,*

while Maitreya says in the ***Sublime Continuum*** during the extensive explanation:

*Likewise, the uncontaminated awareness present in all  
embodied beings is analogous to honey,  
And the Buddhas, who are experts in conquering  
afflictions analogous to bees, are like the person.*

Furthermore, regarding the subject, the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom that is asserted by the proponents of the Cittamātra, it is not *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, because not all sentient beings possess such a seed. Not all sentient beings possess the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom because it is possible that there are sentient beings who do not have such a seed."

Our response to Rongtikpa's assertion is: this is not correct because it contradicts the sutra, the ***Sublime Continuum***, the three commentaries as well as Rongtikpa's own assertions.

The three commentaries here are:

- i. Arya Vimuktisena's ***Illuminating the [Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]*** (Skt. *Abhisamayālaṅkāravṛtti*, Tib: *nyi khri snang ba*)

- ii. Haribhadra's ***Illuminating the Ornament*** (Skt.: ***Abhisamayālaṃkāralokaprajna*** = ***paramitavyākhyā***, Tib: ***rgyan snang***)
- iii. Haribhadra's ***Commentary Clarifying the Meaning*** (Skt.: ***Sphuṭārtha***, Tib: ***'grel pa don gsal***)

Rongtikpa's assertion contradicts the sutra because Buddha Shakyamuni says in the ***Flower Garland Sutra*** (Skt.: ***Avatamsakasutra***, Tib: ***mdo phal chen***)

*Pay heed! The Buddha Nature of Bodhisattvas, children of the Victorious Ones, is natural clear light, vast as space, being mainly the sphere of reality. Bodhisattvas who abide in such [nature] arose as past Bhagavan Buddhas, will arise as future Bhagavan Buddhas, have arisen as present Bhagavan Buddhas.*

Rongtikpa's assertion contradicts the ***Sublime Continuum*** (Skt. ***Uttaratantra***, Tib: ***rgyud bla ma***) because Maitreya says in that text:

*It is asserted that from these two types of nature,  
One attains the three Kayas of a Buddha;  
The first Kaya through the first  
Through the second the latter two [Kayas].*

Here, Maitreya explains that the first Kaya, the *Dharmakaya* - or more precisely - the *Nature Body of Natural Purity*, is attained in dependence on *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*. Therefore, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is suitable to become the *Nature Body of Natural Purity* of a Buddha.

However, according to Rongtikpa's assertion, *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is not suitable to become the *Nature Body of Natural Purity* because the clear and knowing aspect

of a Buddha's mind is not the *Nature Body of Natural Purity* of a Buddha.

Rongtikpa's assertion contradicts the three commentaries because Arya Vimuktisena says in his ***Illuminating the [Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] Twenty-Thousand [Verses]***:

*[Alternatively,] if [one asserts that the term "natural"] is synonymous with dharmatā (i.e., emptiness) there is no fault.*

Haribhadra says in his ***Illuminating the Ornament***:

*The term "nature" is applied to the sphere of reality on account of [it] being posited as the entity of the cause.*

And Haribhadra says in his ***Commentary Clarifying the Meaning***:

*Nature is indicated only with regard to the entity of the sphere of reality.*

Therefore, Rongtikpa's assertion contradicts the three commentaries because the three commentaries indicate that whatever is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature* is necessarily the sphere of reality (i.e., emptiness) and because the sphere of reality and the mind are contradictory. The sphere of reality and the mind are contradictory because whatever is emptiness is necessarily a non-affirming negation. Whatever is emptiness is necessarily a non-affirming negation because Chandrakirti says in his ***Clear Words*** (Skt.: [Prasannapadā](#), Tib: ***tshig gsal***):

*Because it is accepted that it is stated as a non-affirming negation*

Bhavaviveka says in his ***Lamp of Wisdom*** (Skt.: ***Prajnadipa***, Tib: ***shes rab sgron ma***)



*"To be nothing at all" is a phrase that provides the final meaning of a non-affirming negation*

Also, Rongtikpa's second statement (that there are sentient beings who do not possess the seed of uncontaminated exalted wisdom) contradicts his own assertions because he holds that all sentient beings will attain Buddhahood.

Furthermore, regarding the subject, 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum', it follows that it is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, because it is the substantial cause of the *Jnanakaya* of a Buddha.

Rongtikpa asserts the pervasion.

However, it is not correct to accept (that 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' is *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*), because 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' does not exist in the continuum of all sentient beings. 'The uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum' does not exist in the continuum of all sentient beings, because there are sentient beings who are not endowed with 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum'.

Also, regarding the subject, 'the uninterrupted path at the end of the continuum', it follows that it is not *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*, because it is *Evolving Buddha Nature*.

This concludes a presentation of Buddha Nature in general and the two types of Buddha Nature (*Naturally Abiding* and *Evolving*) in particular in accordance with the **General Meaning** and **Decisive Analysis** by Panchen Sonam Drakpa.

Next follows a presentation of the thirteen types of Buddha Nature.



## The thirteen types of Buddha Nature

Maitreya's **Ornament** describes Buddha Nature by way of three verses. The first two verses enumerate the thirteen types of Buddha Nature while the third verse presents a debate.

Before describing the thirteen types of Buddha Nature, Haribhadra's **Commentary Clarifying the Meaning** first presents a conjunctive (introductory) passage:

*In the continuum of someone who possesses practice, the partial concordance of definite discrimination (i.e., the Mahayana path of preparation) which has been explained and the path of seeing and so forth will arise. Thus, [Buddha Nature] serves as the support of practices.*

Gyaltsab je comments on the meaning of Haribhadra's passage in his **Ornament of the Essence** and explains why the categories of Buddha Nature described here refer to the emptinesses of Mahayana paths in the continuum of Bodhisattvas who have at least reached the Mahayana path of preparation:

*Without awakening Mahayana Nature, one will not engage in the Generated Mind (i.e., Bodhicitta) and so on. And even if one were to engage in it, it would not be firm. Hence, it is necessary to awaken [Mahayana] Nature. If one possesses [Mahayana] Nature which is suitable to give rise to practices, the partial concordance of definite discrimination (i.e., the Mahayana path of preparation) which has been explained, the path of seeing that will be explained and so forth will arise. Thus, I shall explain [Buddha] Nature that serves as the support of practices.*

*The Mahayana path of accumulation also depends on [Buddha] Nature. However, since [the Mahayana path of accumulation] is not the primary state when [Buddha] Nature is nourished more and more and when one is separated from the hindrances to [Buddha] Nature, [Buddha] Nature [on the Mahayana path of accumulation] is not taught.*

Also:

*[The reason for] teaching the support (i.e., the emptiness) from the Mahayana path of preparation onwards: [From the Mahayana path of preparation onwards] one is free from the four hindrances [to Buddha Nature] and through focusing on and familiarizing with Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature by way of the wisdom arisen from meditation, one will become empowered to attain Arya qualities. Hence, [Buddha Nature, such as the thirteen types of Buddha Nature] is presented from the [Mahayana] path of preparation onwards.*

The two verses in the **Ornament** that enumerate the thirteen types of Buddha Nature are:

*The six dharmas of realization,  
The antidote and the elimination,  
Having fully consumed those,  
Endowed with wisdom and compassionate love,  
Not common to disciples  
The proper sequence of others' benefit,  
And exalted wisdom engaging without exertion -  
Their support should be known as Buddha Nature.*

The meaning of the two verses is:

The **support**, *i.e.*, the emptinesses of the following thirteen types of practice **should be known as Buddha Nature**. The thirteen types of practice are (1-6) **the six dharmas of realization**, (7) the practice awareness of **the antidote**, (8) **the practice that eliminates**, (9) the practice of **having fully consumed those**, (10) the practice **endowed with wisdom and compassionate love**, (11) the practice that is **not in common with disciples** (*i.e.*, Hearers and Solitary Realizers), (12) the practice that works for the **benefit of others** in the **proper sequence**, and (13) the practice that engages in **exalted wisdom without exertion**.

The six dharmas of realization are: the (1) heat, (2) peak, (3) forbearance, and (4) supreme Dharma levels of the Mahayana path of preparation, (5) the path of seeing, and (6) the path of meditation.

Panchen Sonam Drakpa explains in his ***General Meaning***:

The reason for positing thirteen types of Buddha Nature is that there are thirteen types of Mahayana practice indicated here that are definite in number, and their support is the thirteen types of *Naturally Abiding Buddha Nature*.

The thirteen types of Mahayana practice are definite in number because from the point of view of the **entity** of Mahayana practices there are the *six dharmas of realization* (1 - 6).

From the point of view of **function** there are (7) *the practice of the antidote*, (8) *the practice that eliminates*, and (9) *the practice of having fully consumed those*. And from the point of view of the **demarcation** there are four practices, such as (10) *the practice endowed with wisdom and compassionate love*, and so forth.

(As mentioned above, the *six dharmas of realization* are the (1) heat, (2) peak, (3) forbearance, and (4) supreme Dharma levels of the Mahayana path of preparation, (5) the path of seeing, and (6) the path of meditation.)

The six types of practice from the point of view of **entity** (i.e., *the six dharma realizations*) are definite in number because whatever is a practice in the continuum of someone who has reached at least the Mahayana path of preparation indicated here is necessarily one of the six types of practice.

The three types of practice from the point of view of **function** are definite in number because from the point of view of an awareness that serves as an antidote to obstructions there is (7) *the practice of the antidote*, from the point of view of an awareness that eliminates obstructions there is (8) *the practice that eliminates*, and from the point of view of having eliminated obstructions there is (9) *the practice of having fully consumed those*.

(7) *The practice of the antidote* and a path in the continuum of a Bodhisattva are equivalent, for whatever is a practice of the antidote is necessarily a Mahayana learner path (a Mahayana path of accumulation, preparation, seeing, or meditation), and whatever is a path in the continuum of a Bodhisattva is necessarily *a practice of the antidote*. Whatever is a path in the continuum of a Bodhisattva is necessarily *a practice of the antidote* because whatever is a path in the continuum of a Bodhisattva is necessarily a Mahayana practice awareness that serves as an antidote to any of the obstructions.

(8) *The practice that eliminates* refers to uninterrupted paths in the continuum of Arya Bodhisattvas on the path of seeing or meditation. Uninterrupted paths serve as the direct antidotes to their respective objects of elimination (afflictive

or cognitive obstructions) and therefore irrevocably eliminate those objects of elimination.

(9) *The practice of having fully consumed those* refers to Arya Bodhisattvas' paths of release on the path of seeing or meditation which are induced by and arise immediately after uninterrupted paths. They attain the cessation of the objects of elimination (that the preceding uninterrupted paths eliminate), and thus have eliminated or 'fully consumed those' objects of elimination.

From the perspective of **demarcation**, the four types of practice are definite in number because from the point of view of the eighth ground there is (10) *the practice endowed with wisdom and compassionate love*, from the point of view of the ninth ground there is (11) *the practice awareness that is not in common* (i.e., with Hearers and Solitary Realizers), from the point of view of subsequent attainment paths of the tenth ground there is (12) *the practice that works for others in the proper sequence*, and from the point of view of the 'the end of the continuum' on the tenth ground there is (13) *the practice that engages in exalted wisdom without exertion*.

From the point of view of the eighth ground there is (10) *the practice endowed with wisdom and compassionate love* because on the subsequent attainment level of the eighth ground Bodhisattvas have eliminated grasping at true existence and the awareness engaged in self-interest (Tib: *rang don yid byed kyi blo*).

This is because the Buddha says in the ***Vajra Peak, the Great Tantra of the Yoga of Guhyasamaja?*** (Skt.: ***Vajrasekharamahaguhya-yogatantram***, Tib: ***gsang ba rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud rdo rje rtse mo***): "For as long as one does not attain the eighth ground, one does not overcome the fear of [entering] the Hinayana [path].", and because on the

eighth ground Bodhisattvas newly attain the 'training of the equality of existence and peace'. Here 'existence' refers to Samsara and 'peace' to Nirvana. The 'training in the equality of existence and peace' is an awareness on one of the three pure grounds (the eighth, ninth, and tenth ground) that is the main cause of the *Jnanakaya* of a Buddha and thus typical of the wisdom aspect.

In short, *the practice-awareness endowed with wisdom and compassionate love* is a practice-awareness that manifests on one of the three pure grounds (eighth, ninth, or tenth ground). It is typical of either the wisdom or method aspect, i.e., it pertains to either the wisdom or method aspect of practice. It is newly cultivated on the eighth ground because on that ground one newly attains the cessation of the ignorance grasping at true existence and the cessation of the awareness engaged in self-interest. On the eighth ground one also overcomes any fear of entering the lower vehicle and newly attains the 'training in equality of existence and peace'. Gyaltsab je explains in his ***Ornament of the Essence*** that *the practice-awareness endowed with wisdom and compassionate love* arises by the power of having previously prayed, "May I be able to effortlessly work for the benefit of others" and having become skilled in the practice of the six perfections.

From the point of view of the ninth ground there is (11) *the practice awareness that is not in common with disciples* (i.e., Hearers and Solitary Realizers) because by the power of having attained the *practice that is endowed with wisdom and compassionate love* on the eighth ground, Bodhisattvas newly attain the practice that is not common with Hearers and so forth on the ninth ground.

According to Gyaltsab je's ***Ornament of the Essence***, as a result of the method and wisdom of the eighth ground,



Bodhisattvas on the ninth ground newly attain 'the four types of detailed proper knowledge' (Tib: *so so yang dag par rig pa bzhi*) which enable Bodhisattvas to ripen sentient beings.

The four types of detailed proper knowledge are:

- i. Detailed proper knowledge of dharmas (Tib: *chos so so yang dag par rig pa*)
- ii. Detailed proper knowledge of the meaning (Tib: *don so so yang dag par rig pa*)
- iii. Detailed proper knowledge of definite words (Tib: *nges tshig so so yang dag par rig pa*)
- iv. Detailed proper knowledge of confidence (Tib: *spobs pa so so yang dag par rig pa*)

The four types of detailed proper knowledge enable a Bodhisattva to teach others the qualities of his realizations. The former two types of knowledge are concerned with that which is explained and the latter two with the person explaining. Detailed proper knowledge of Dharma refers to the detailed and proper knowledge of the terminology found in Buddhist scriptures. Detailed proper knowledge of the meaning refers to the detailed and proper knowledge of the meaning of the concepts found in Buddhist scriptures. Detailed proper knowledge of definite words refers to the detailed and proper knowledge of synonyms (alternative words) of the terminology found in Buddhist scriptures. And detailed proper knowledge of confidence refers to the detailed and proper knowledge of the confidence to teach (having the ability to present different reasons, etc.)

From the point of view of subsequent attainment paths of the tenth ground there is (12) *the practice that works for others in the proper sequence* because on the subsequent attainment path of the tenth ground, Bodhisattvas' work for the benefit of sentient beings equals that of Buddhas.



Maitreya says in his **Sublime Continuum**:

*The way Bodhisattvas [work for the benefit of sentient beings]*

*During the subsequent attainment [period]*

*Equals Tathagathas' [actions]*

*Of liberating sentient beings in the world.*

Gyaltsab je's **Ornament of the Essence** explains that *the practice that works for others in the proper sequence* refers to the practice in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the tenth ground who spontaneously works for the benefit of others, leading them to one of the three vehicles (the Hearer, Solitary Realizer, or Bodhisattva vehicle) 'in the proper sequence' by giving them interpretative or definite teachings according to the disciples' way of thinking and so on.

From the point of view of 'the end of the continuum' of the tenth ground there is (13) *the practice that engages in exalted wisdom without exertion*. A Bodhisattva who is at 'the end of the continuum' refers to a Bodhisattva in his last rebirth as a sentient being before becoming a Buddha. Hence, he abides at the end of the continuum as a sentient being. *The practice that engages in exalted wisdom without exertion* refers to the practice in the continuum of Bodhisattvas at the end of the continuum, which engages effortlessly in the exalted wisdom that perceives conventional or ultimate truths; immediately after the exalted wisdom at the end of the continuum, the final practice of a Buddha who engages in exalted wisdom without exertion is attained.

With regard to the six *dharma*s of realization, Haribhadra says in his **Commentary Clarifying the Meaning**:

*Temporarily, at the beginning, there are (1 - 4) the mundane [four levels] of the partial concordances of*

*definite discrimination (i.e., the four levels of the path of preparation). After that, there are (5) the supramundane path of seeing and (6) the path of meditation.*

Gyaltsab je comments on this passage by explaining in his **Ornament of the Essence**:

*With regard to the subject, the dharmatā of (1 - 4) [the four levels of] the partial concordance of definite discrimination that temporarily [arise] at the beginning, it is the support [of the four levels] because it is the dharmatā of [these paths]. By focusing and meditating on [that dharmatā, the paths] are developed more and more.*

*After [the dharmatā of the four levels] there is the dharmatā that is the support of (5) the supramundane path of seeing which newly realizes emptiness by way of direct perception and [the dharmatā of] (6) the path of meditation which familiarizes itself with that which has been [directly] realized [during the path of seeing]; they are called '[Buddha] Nature'.*

*Do not think that only the seventh ground and the paths and grounds below the seventh ground are indicated here; the path of meditation itself is indicated.*

With regard to the remaining practices (7 - 13), Gyaltsab je says in his **Ornament of the Essence**:

*The support (i.e., emptiness) [of the following practice awarenesses] is called 'Nature': (7 - 8) that which eliminates by way of moving close to the antidote having arisen, the uninterrupted path, and moving close to the seeds of the objects of elimination having ceased [taking place simultaneously], (9) the path of release which fully consumes those objects of elimination, (10) [practice]*

*endowed with wisdom and compassionate love that stop the extremes of existence (Samsara) and peace (Nirvana), (11) that which is uncommon to disciples, Hearers, and so forth, (12) practice [that works for] the benefit of others in the proper sequence, and (13) that which engages in exalted wisdom of the two objects of knowledge, varieties (conventional truths) and modes of existence (ultimate truths), without exertion.*

Furthermore, Gyaltsab je's **Ornament of the Essence** cites the sutric passages that present each of the thirteen types of Buddha Nature:

*The dharmatā (i.e., emptiness) endowed with stains, which is the support of the six dharmas of realization is called [Buddha] Nature. [The following sutric passages] present the support [of the thirteen types of practice]:*

*The sutra that presents [the emptiness of] the (1) heat [level of the Mahayana path of preparation], “Subhuti, the tracks of a bird in the sky do not exist and are not perceived. Likewise, the meaning of the word ‘Bodhisattva’ does not exist and is not observed.”*

*The sutra that presents [the emptiness of] the (2) peak [level of the Mahayana path of preparation], “Abiding in the perfect limit (i.e., ultimate truth) does not exist and is not observed.”*

*The sutra that presents [the emptiness of] the (3) forbearance [level of the Mahayana path of preparation], “Abiding in the form of an illusion-like being does not exist and is not observed.”*

*The sutra that presents [the emptiness of] the (4) supreme Dharma [level of the Mahayana path of preparation], “The*

*meaning of the words 'practicing the inner emptiness of an illusion-like being' does not exist and is not observed."*

*The sutra that presents [the emptiness of] the (5) [Mahayana] path of seeing, "The meaning of the words: 'the form of a tathāgata , foe-destroyer, perfect, complete Buddha' does not exist and is not observed."*

*The sutra that presents [the emptiness of] the (6) [Mahayana] path of meditation, "The meaning of the words 'no arising' does not exist and is not observed."*

*[...]*

*[The sutra that presents the emptiness of (7) the practice of the antidote]: "When the sun shines brightly, abiding of darkness does not exist and is not observed."*

*[The sutra that presents the emptiness of (8) the practice that eliminates]: "When the fire of the eon blazes, abiding of all types of conditioned factors does not exist and is not observed."*

*[The sutra that presents the emptiness of (9) the practice of having fully consumed those]: "With respect to the ethics of a Tathāgata , foe-destroyer, perfect complete buddha, abiding of bad ethics does not exist and is not observed."*

*[The sutra that presents the emptiness of (10) the practice endowed with wisdom and compassionate love]: "Abiding in the light of the sun and the moon does not exist and is not observed."*

*[The sutra that presents the emptiness of (11) the practice awareness that is not in common with disciples], "Abiding in the splendor of Hearers, Solitary Realizers, constellations, stars, precious gems, and lightning does not exist and is not observed."*

*[The sutra that presents the emptiness of (12) the practice that works for others in the proper sequence]: “Abiding in the splendor of the celestial beings of the classes of the Four Great Kings does not exist and is not observed.”*

*[The sutra that presents the emptiness of (13) the practice that engages in exalted wisdom without exertion]: “Abiding in the splendor of a Tathagata, Foe-destroyer, perfect, complete Buddha does not exist and is not observed.”*

This completes the presentation of the thirteen types of Buddha Nature. Next comes a presentation of direct antidotes (uninterrupted paths) and their mode of eliminating obstructions. This topic diverges from the (7 - 9) three types of practice from the point of view of **function** (*practice of the antidote, practice of elimination, and practice of fully consuming those*).

**Dharma Friends  
of Israel**



**ידידי הדharma**